

Human Ecology and the Prophetic Value of *Humanae Vitae*

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“Inquiry into final causes is sterile, and, like a virgin consecrated to God, produces nothing.” —Francis Bacon¹

AT THE HEART of empirical science is—as these words by the father of modern science reveal—an eradication, or “sterilizing,” of what had previously been the hallmark of all scientific inquiry: the conviction that natural beings are really inclined *from within* to nature-specified and nature-perfecting ends. Faulting previous scientists and philosophers for imposing their own logical or mental order upon nature, which in itself was judged to be orderless, Bacon inaugurated a new scientific era. Introducing the “new instrument” (*novum organum*) of inductive reasoning, he ousted the deductive method that reasons from “ordered” hypotheses. Rather than *anticipate* nature, we must *interpret* her, the founding father of empiricism argues. To be sure, this would require long hours of painstaking observation, but the efforts—as Bacon accurately predicted—were quickly rewarded by knowledge hitherto unimagined.

Of course, this new treasury of knowledge was likewise forged by the conviction that scientific advancement need answer to no moral code other than its own advancement. Given Bacon’s denial of nature’s own normative value, the only values governing empirical science are, as Pope Francis observes in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*,

¹ Francis Bacon, *De augmentis scientiarum* (1623) 3.5: “Nam causarum finalium inquisitio sterilis est, et, tanquam virgo Deo consecrata, nihil parit.”

those of “utility or security.”² Moreover, because this science understands nature as “formless” and “completely open to manipulation,”³ it encourages “a Promethean vision of mastery over the world” whereby the divine command to exercise dominion over nature (e.g., Gen 1:28–30) is transformed from stewardship to domination.⁴ Technology tends “to absorb everything” into its “ironclad logic,” Pope Francis continues, including “the naked elements of both nature and human nature”.⁵

Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us.⁶

Perhaps nowhere is the logic of empiricism as portrayed by Pope Francis so manifest, I will argue in these pages, as in the prophetic character of the popularly designated “birth-control encyclical,” *Humane Vitae*: “prophetic,” the bishops of the 1980 synod on marriage and family recognized, “not only in [its] defense of the freedom of conscience of the Third World [i.e., against pressure from first-world nations to control local population growth],” but also and most especially, Joseph Ratzinger reports, “as a defense of the human being and of creation in general” from a common disregard for “God’s creative intentions” (*Schöpfungsidee Gottes*) for the world, including his intentions for human persons.⁷

² Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (2015), §105, with reference to Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1998), 83.

³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §106.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §116. We are reminded of the dual etymological root of both “dominion” and “dominate”: *dominus* (lord) and *domus* (house).

⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §108, with reference to Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, 56.

⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §106.

⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, “Rückblick auf die Bischofssynode zu Ehe und Familie 1980,” in *Einführung in das Christentum. Bekenntnis-Taufe-Nachfolge*, vol. 4 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2014), 622–49, at 645 (translation mine).

To be sure, as Ratzinger notes, it is commonly argued that we must protect nature “from the human being; but [the fact] that the human being is also a creation and that he [or she] must protect creation in himself [or herself], that [fact] the human being does not want to see.” To disregard, even “scorn” (*Verachten*), the “reason” (*Vernunft*) of creation is, however, Ratzinger continues, to ironically deny the very foundation of technology, including contraceptive technologies in the case at hand. For, “technology could not exist if creation did not bear reason within itself,”⁸ if it were not meaningful as the expression of “a creative reason.”⁹

Pointing in this way to the normative value of human nature *qua* created, Ratzinger likewise points to the foundation of a sound ecology whose importance—he acknowledges many years later as Pope—“is no longer disputed.” Nonetheless “neglected,” he regretfully observes in words that would eventually inspire Pope Francis, is what he calls “an ecology of man”:

Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. In this way, and in no other, is true human freedom fulfilled.¹⁰

Or, as Pope Francis argues in *Laudato Si'*, “human ecology” entails an acknowledgement of “the relationship between human life and moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment.”¹¹

In this way, a human ecology calls also for the reversal of “an epistemological paradigm” based on “the method and aims of science and technology” that continues to shape “the lives of individuals and the workings of society.”¹² “The technological mind,”

⁸ Ratzinger, “Rückblick auf die Bischofssynode,” 645.

⁹ See Pope Benedict XVI, “The Listening Heart: Reflections on the Foundations of Law,” Visit to the Bundestag, September 22, 2011, w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin.html.

¹⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, “The Listening Heart.”

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §155; see also §115.

¹² Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §107.

Francis explains in words borrowed from Romano Guardini, “sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere ‘given,’ as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape.”¹³ Hence, the human body, for example, is “no longer perceived as a properly personal reality, a sign and place of relations with others, with God and with the world,” as John Paul II also observes, “but rather as ‘pure materiality’ . . . a complex of organs, functions and energies to be used according to the sole criteria of pleasure and efficiency.” As for human sexuality, it is likewise “depersonalized and exploited: from being the sign, place and language of love, that is, of the gift of self and acceptance of another, in all the other’s richness as a person, it increasingly becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts.”¹⁴

In short, as Pope Francis mournfully acknowledges, “modern anthropocentrism paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality,”¹⁵ over the world that God has created—whence Francis’s invitation to recognize the norm and measure of human knowledge, and thus also of human action, in what St. Thomas calls, “the thing itself [*ipsa res*]”:¹⁶ the creature *qua* created. “The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is,” Pope Francis argues, “vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation.” Hence, “learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology.”¹⁷

This challenge of preserving and even fostering, by way of our actions, the specific good of human nature, and thus human sexuality as created, is—I will argue in agreement with the 1980 synod fathers to whom Ratzinger refers above—one that was already launched by Paul VI in what has fittingly been designated “the

¹³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §115. See also Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, 55.

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), §23.

¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §115.

¹⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 64, a. 3, ad 2. Such, I would suggest, is the origin of Francis’s repeated insistence that “realities are greater than ideas.” See, for example, his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), §231, and *Laudato Si'*, §§110 and 201.

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §155.

most controversial encyclical in history,”¹⁸ *Humanae Vitae* (1968). His purpose, he tells us, was most especially (*praesertim*)¹⁹ to respond to a “recent evolution of society” whereby mankind’s “stupendous progress in the domination and rational organization of the forces of nature” had been extended to a domination of “his own total being: to the body, to psychical life, to social life and even to the laws which regulate the transmission of life.”²⁰ Such is the origin of his plea to “all men of good will” to exercise stewardship over their own lives and actions *in accord with the Creator’s design and purpose*, especially in the noble act whereby husband and wife “collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator” in the “transmission of human life.”²¹ Encouraging us “not to abdicate” from our “own responsibility” by “rely[ing] on technical means” that do not respect the “integral wholeness”²² of the conjugal act as specified by the “inseparable connection”²³ between its unitive and procreative meanings, he simultaneously encourages us to recognize that we are “not the master[s] of the sources of life but rather the minister[s] of the design established by the Creator.”²⁴

Meanwhile, in a society that was increasingly conditioned by technology—even, as Paul VI had feared, in the personal and intimate sphere accorded by the Creator to conjugal relations—it was becoming less and less apparent, as Ratzinger observed in 1991, “that man’s Being contains an imperative, . . . that he does not himself *invent* morality on the basis of calculations of expediency but rather *finds* it already present in the essence of things.”²⁵ For the same reason, I will argue, it is increasingly difficult for our contemporaries to discern the distinction between contraception and natural family

¹⁸ George Weigel, *A Witness to Hope* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999), 206.

¹⁹ To be sure, mention is made of the more obvious reasons—new economic and educational demands making it difficult to raise a large family, the threat of overpopulation, and a “new understanding of the dignity of woman and her place in society” (Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* [1968], §2)—but these take on a lesser (secondary) motive.

²⁰ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §2.

²¹ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §1.

²² Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §18.

²³ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §12.

²⁴ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §13.

²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe? The Church in the Modern World: Assessment and Forecast*, trans. Brian McNeil, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 33, 34 [Original: *Wendezeit für Europa? Diagnosen und Prognosen zur Lage von Kirche und Welt* (Einsiedeln, CH: Johannes Verlag, 1991)].

planning as rooted within two fundamentally opposed anthropological and ethical perspectives: perspectives differentiated according to whether one's knowledge of nature is in service of its manipulation, as determined by *one's own subjectively determined ends*—as is the case in the Baconian project at the origin of modern science—or in service, rather, of virtuous actions. These, more specifically, are those of ordering, or governing, one's own impulses, dispositions, and behavior in accord with the *Creator's end or purpose* for marriage and family, indeed, for the human person as such (as specified by human nature). In the second option (when responsible parenthood is exercised by conjugal chastity), there can be no question, as is the case in the first option (when fertility is controlled by the use of contraception), of—I will argue—opposing person and nature, and thus of human reason “impos[ing] its own categories on reality.” Rather, the doctrine of *Humanae Vitae* implies, as Karol Wojtyła put it eight years before his election to the papacy, “the attitude of reason discerning, grasping, defining, and affirming, in relation to an order that is objective and prior to human reason itself”: the order originating from “the divine source of law,” from “divine reason.”²⁶

The Epistemological Challenge of Seeing Beyond the Manipulation of Nature

To be sure, such an attitude of reason “discerning, grasping, defining and affirming” an order that is prior to reason appears congruous with Bacon's insistence on scientific objectivity. It is thus highly ironic that the technological advances forged by his method—those of contraceptive technologies, in the case at hand—have impacted the reasoning process of those living under its regime in a highly counterintuitive manner. Despite amazing advances in the life sciences, including an ever-more precise knowledge of the female fertility cycle, modern men and women are, to be more specific, apparently incapable of drawing very basic inferences concerning the conjugal act. What was evident to the contemporaries of Paul VI—or so he believed—is apparently no longer the case for our own. “We believe,” he wrote in 1968, “that our contemporaries are particularly capable of seeing that this teaching [regarding the ‘inseparable connection . . . between the unitive signifi-

²⁶ Karol Wojtyła, “The Human Person and Natural Law,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 181–85, at 184 (the original Polish was published in 1970).

cance and the procreative significance . . . inherent to the marriage act'] is in harmony with human reason."²⁷ Whether or not that conviction was accurate when the encyclical was first issued, "the majority of Catholics in the West now find the basic principle of the inseparability of the unitive and procreative dimensions of sexual activity simply unintelligible"²⁸—even "unbelievable"²⁹—the Scottish Dominican Fergus Kerr observed in 2007.³⁰

This so-called "unintelligible" principle of *Humanae Vitae* might be summed up as this: sex = strengthened conjugal unity + babies. So what really is blinding in this proposition? Certainly biology is not being called into question. Modern men and women know the "nuts and bolts" of conception, of course. We likewise know—as did Paul VI³¹—that not every "act of insemination (intercourse) is of itself procreative," as Richard McCormick nonetheless deems necessary to point out in his accusation that the magisterium still ascribes to "Aristotelian biology."³² Thanks to the discovery of the ovum in 1827, we now know by deduction (on the basis of scientific *fact* and not of mere hypothesis, in keeping with the requirements of the empirical method) what men and women throughout human history knew by induction: that—it bears repeating—the vast majority of conjugal acts do not lead to conception. It is, moreover, precisely this knowledge that has served Catholic doctors and scientists in their successful work of determining, with amazing precision, a woman's (relatively limited)³³ period of fertility, and they have used this precision to help couples to both achieve and avoid pregnancy without recourse to

²⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §12.

²⁸ Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 214.

²⁹ Kerr, *Twentieth Century Theologians*, 216.

³⁰ Kerr, *Twentieth Century Theologians*, 214. See also Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §§11–12, and *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], §§2366 and 2369.

³¹ See, for example, Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §11.

³² See Richard A. McCormick, "Humanae Vitae 25 Years Later," *America*, July 17, 1993, americamagazine.org/issue/100/humanae-vitae-25-years-later.

³³ Given the lifespan of sperm (five days) and the lifespan of the ovum (24 hours), pregnancy is possible only during the five days preceding ovulation (during which sperm might be kept alive in a woman's very clear mucus) and the actual day of ovulation, and doctors and scientists have become very precise in determining those days based on signs from a woman's body: her body temperature, the opening of her cervix, and the presence and character of her cervical mucus.

contraception.³⁴ In fact, it is arguably in response to the mandate of the Second Vatican Council, which is taken up directly in *Humanae Vitae*, that they have done so.³⁵

Meanwhile (to return to Kerr's observation), a great number of men and women of our time find "unintelligible" the very basis of what Pope Francis designates a "genuine human ecology": the recognition by human reason of a "message contained in the structures of nature," including a "meaning" proper to our bodies in view of the properly human act of governance or stewardship. The failure to recognize this message or meaning is, I suggest along with Pope Francis, a casualty of the empirical method itself, precisely insofar as it is "already a technique of possession, mastery and transformation."³⁶ To be more precise, given the manipulation of the human (especially the female) body and/or the human act of intercourse by means of widespread contraceptive use, even among Catholics,³⁷ the experiential component prescribed by Bacon's method has been tainted at the outset. Because at least two—possibly three—generations of men and women in the Western world have regularly experienced the sexual act quite literally devoid of its intrinsic meanings, it is not surprising

³⁴ Notable is the Paul VI Institute in Omaha, NE, which has created the Creighton Model FertilityCare System and NaProTechnology. See their website at popepaulvi.com/.

³⁵ On the mandate, see Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §24.

³⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §§117, 155, 106.

³⁷ In the United States, for example, see: Mary Rice Hasson and Michele M. Hill, "What Catholic Women Think about Faith, Conscience, and Contraception: Preliminary Report," August 2013, eppc.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/What_Catholic_Women_Think_Contraception-Aug_2012.pdf; Mark M. Gray and Mary L. Gautier, *Catholic Women in the United States: Beliefs, Practices, Experiences, and Attitudes* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 30–31 (cara.georgetown.edu/CatholicWomenStudy.pdf); Richard Fehring and Andrea Schlidt, "Trends in Contraceptive Use among Catholics in the United States: 1988–1995," *Linacre Quarterly* 68 (May 2001): 170–185. Questionable is Rachel K. Jones and Joerg Dreweke, "Countering Conventional Wisdom: New Evidence on Religion and Contraceptive Use," *Guttmacher Institute*, April 2011, guttmacher.org/report/countering-conventional-wisdom-new-evidence-religion-and-contraceptive-use. On the inaccuracy of the latter report, see Glen Kessler, "The Claim that 98 Percent of Catholic Women Use Contraception: A Media Foul," *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2012, washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/post/the-claim-that-98-percent-of-catholic-women-use-contraception-a-media-foul/2012/02/16/gIQAkPeqIR_blog.html?utm_term=.07fa1e3da449.

that the epistemological association between sex and procreation has practically disappeared from our mental registry.

Take, for example, the case of a certain Judith Schwartz, writing in a popular women's magazine in 1993, who identifies herself as belonging to the first generation "to define a good girl not as someone who abstains from sex but as someone who 'takes precautions.'" Schwartz—one such "good girl" who "conscientiously" avoids "being in a state of potential motherhood"—attributes to this contraceptive "diligence" and "hygiene" her inability to draw the logical connection between sex and pregnancy. "That it takes egg and sperm to make a baby is among the more obvious facts that women live with," she admits; "Yet somehow we don't *live* with it. As daughters of the sexual revolution, we've been surrounded all our lives by the images and temptations of recreational sex. Consequently, basic, species-preserving, reproductive sex occupies a separate, wholly unexplored territory in our mind."³⁸

Because, as this example serves to illustrate, we have effectively manipulated our own human nature by manipulating the human (again, especially female) body in accord with our own (often) contorted intentions—those of, for example, reproductive "freedom" or sexual "liberation"—it is not surprising that our conceptions of our nature's purposes, meanings, and ends have also changed.³⁹ When, in fact, human nature is altered by the human will and intelligence in a way that is arguably in conflict with nature's own purposes, it (nature) cannot be brought to the witness stand to testify against itself. To do so—to question nature's purpose according to the assumption that it must be "assumed into the human sphere and be regulated within it [presumably by way of technological and scientific domination, as differing from virtuous abstinence],"⁴⁰ as the popularly desig-

³⁸ Judith D. Schwartz, "How Birth Control Has Changed Women's Sexuality," *Glamour*, March 1993, 236.

³⁹ As Lisa Sowle Cahill points out, "the connection between sex, love, and babies cannot be apprehended, much less credibly advocated, in any individualist or act-oriented concept of sex" (*Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 206). Cahill concludes here that, "the defenders of official Catholic teaching are not wrong in their uneasiness about the prevalence of social attitudes toward sex which, in divorcing sex from procreation, also seem to divorce it from commitment and responsibility."

⁴⁰ "The Birth Control Report, III: The Argument for Reform," *The Tablet* 221, no. 6624 (May 6, 1967): 510–513, at 512; also published in Latin in *Contrôle des naissances et théologie*, ed. Jean-Marie Paupert (Paris: Editions du

nated majority report of the famous papal birth control commission, charged to advise Paul VI, put it one year before *Humanae Vitae* was issued⁴¹—is to divide the human being into “parts, organs, functions” that are “conceived as contra-distinct from him [or her].” This division, in turn, serves the subordination of man’s “parts” to his or her spiritual nature “almost as are plants and animals” in reason of “cultural values,” as the minority report put it in that same year.⁴²

“Humanization”: Technical Mastery of the Human Body or Virtuous Self-Control?

Implied in this divisive thinking is a radical spiritualization of the human being and a reduction of the human body “to raw material for human activity and for its power,” as Pope John Paul II observed nearly thirty years later, as if to foreshadow Pope Francis’s own insights. Hence, this “nature needs to be profoundly transformed, and indeed overcome by freedom,” John Paul II continues, “inasmuch

Seuil, 1967), 156–62, at 159 (“in sphaeram humanam assumi et in ea regulari debet”). This “report” is, in fact, a rebuttal to the so-called “minority” report cited below under the title: “The Birth Control Report, II: The Conservative Case”).

⁴¹ For more information on the reports and the controversy they stirred at the time of the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, see: Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 206–10; Janet E. Smith, *Humanae Vitae: A Generation Later* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 11–35; and Richard J. Fehring and Elizabeth McGraw, “Spiritual Responses to the Regulation of Birth (A Historical Comparison),” *Life and Learning* 12 (2002): 265–86 (ufl.org/vol12/fehring12.pdf). The original “majority” report was printed as “Birth Control Report, I: The Majority View,” *The Tablet* 221, no. 6622 (April 22, 1967): 449–55. The report was also published under the title “Majority Papal Commission Report” in *The Catholic Case for Contraception*, ed. Daniel Callahan (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), 149–73 (credit is given there to the *National Catholic Reporter*, April 19, 1967), and in Latin as “Schema documenti de responsabili paternitate” in Paupert, *Contrôle des naissance et théologie*, 179–89. See also the so-called “Final Report to the Pope” dated May 26, 1966: “The Papal Commission on Birth Control,” *The Tablet* 222, no. 6696 (September 21, 1968): 947–51.

⁴² “The Birth Control Report, II: The Conservative Case,” *The Tablet* 222, no. 6623 (April 29, 1967): 478–85, at 482; also published as “Minority Papal Commission Report” in Callahan, *The Catholic Case for Contraception*, 174–211, at 194 (credit here is given to the *National Catholic Reporter*, April 19, 1967). The Latin text (“Status quaestionis”) is available in Paupert, *Contrôle des naissance et théologie*, 163–78, at 171: “Elementa, organa, functiones quae sunt in homine, concipiuntur quasi ab ipso contradistincta ; eidemque pro valoribus culturalibus subordinata, fere sicut plantae aut animalia.”

as it represents a limitation and denial of freedom.”⁴³ Completely disregarded in this dualist anthropology is the mediating role of the passions, which, the Catechism instructs us, “form the passageway and ensure the connection between the life of the senses and the life of the mind.”⁴⁴ Consequently, the fundamental moral task of *moderating* the passions in accord with reason and an upright conscience and that of *ordering and directing* them to the specific human good of virtuous living are also neglected.⁴⁵ From the perspective of a holistic anthropology, on the other hand—one that understands moral perfection as consisting “in man’s being moved to the good not by his will alone, but also by his sensitive appetite”⁴⁶—the decision to space children and to limit the size of one’s family is to be made with respect not only to “physical, economic, psychological and social conditions.” Nor is it enough to complement these principles of discernment with respect for “the biological processes,” with “an awareness of, and respect for, their proper functions.” Both of these factors must be further complemented, Pope Paul VI teaches, by a specific regard for “man’s innate drives and emotions.” Indeed, from the latter perspective, “responsible parenthood means that man’s reason and will must exert control over them”⁴⁷ in view of ordering them to the authentic good of the person, the couple, the family, and society, a good that is specified by human nature as simultaneously spiritual and physical.

The challenge of exercising “responsible parenthood”⁴⁸ is, in short, one that Paul VI exhorted couples to assume not by way of an aggressive “domination and rational organization”⁴⁹ of our sexual nature by way of technical and chemical contraceptives that have proven harmful to the human body-person,⁵⁰ to the couple and to

⁴³ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), §46; see also Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), §5.

⁴⁴ CCC, §1764.

⁴⁵ CCC, §1767: “It belongs to the perfection of the moral or human good that the passions be governed by reason.” See also CCC, §1768.

⁴⁶ CCC, §1770; see also §1775.

⁴⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §10. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, §97.

⁴⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §10.

⁴⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §2.

⁵⁰ See, for example: Lina S. Mørch et al., “Contemporary Hormonal Contraception and the Risk of Breast Cancer,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 377 (December 7, 2017): 2228–39; Anthony G. Jay, *Estrogenation: How Estrogens are Making You Fat, Sick, and Infertile* (Tallahassee, FL: Pyrimidine, 2017); Nicolas Lambert, *La pilule un bienfait pour ma santé, ma fertilité ?* (Saint-Denis, FR: Connaissances et Savoirs, 2016); Charlotte Wessel Skovlund et al., “Association

the family,⁵¹ to society,⁵² and even to the natural environment,⁵³ but rather by way of “self-mastery”⁵⁴: the virtuous ordering of our passions to the authentic human goods of procreation and marital communion.

of Hormonal Contraception with Suicide Attempts and Suicides,” *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, November 17, 2017, ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/abs/10.1176/appi.ajp.2017.17060616; Jennie L. Lovette et al., “Oral Contraceptives Cause Evolutionarily Novel Increases in Hormone Exposure,” *Evolution, Medicine, and Public Health*, June 5, 2017, 97–108, doi: 10.1093/emph/eox009; Lori Smith, “Ten Most Common Birth Control Pill Side Effects,” *Medical News Today*, January 21, 2016, medicalnewstoday.com/articles/290196.php; Unity Blott, “‘I Produced Breast Milk for a Year’: Women Reveal the Terrifying Side Effects They’ve Had after Taking Contraception as #MyPill-Story Trends on Twitter,” *Mail Online*, April 22, 2016, dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3522509/Women-share-terrifying-effects-contraceptive-pill-MyPill-Story-hashtag.html; and Urmie Khan, “Men Under Threat From Gender Bending Chemicals,” *The Telegraph*, December 7, 2008, telegraph.co.uk/news/health/3660141/Men-under-threat-from-gender-bending-chemicals.html.

⁵¹ See, for example: Mark Regnerus, *Cheap Sex: The Transformation of Men, Marriage and Monogamy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Jennifer Lahl, “Modern Families and the Messes We Make,” *The Public Discourse*, November 1, 2013, thepublicdiscourse.com/2013/11/11111/; Laura Sessions Stepps, *Unhooked: How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love and Lose at Both* (New York: Riverhead, 2008); Donna Frietas, *The End of the Sex: How Hookup Culture is Leaving a Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfulfilled, and Confused about Intimacy* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

⁵² See, for example, Mary Eberstadt, *Adam and Eve after the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012); see also note 136 below.

⁵³ See, for example : Karen A. Kidd et al., “Collapse of a Fish Population After Exposure to a Synthetic Estrogen,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 104, no. 21 (May 22, 2007): 8897–901; Maëlle Cargouët et al., “Assessment of River Contamination by Estrogen Compounds in Paris Area (France),” *Science of the Total Environment* 324, no. 1–3 (May 25, 2004): 55–66; Douglas B. Chambers and Thomas J. Leiker, “A Reconnaissance for Emerging Contaminants in the South Branch Potomac River, Cacapon River, and Williams River Basins, West Virginia, April–October 2004,” U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Geological Survey, Open-File Report 2006-1393, usgs.gov/of/2006/1393/pdf/ofr20061393.pdf; Ramji K. Bhandari et al., “Transgenerational Effects from Early Developmental Exposures to Bisphenol A or 17 α -ethinylestradiol in Medaka, *Oryzias latipes*,” *Scientific Reports* 5 (March 20, 2015): 9303; Donna W. Kolpin et al., “Pharmaceuticals, Hormones, and Other Organic Wastewater Contaminants in U.S. Streams, 1999–2000: A National Reconnaissance,” *Environmental Science & Technology* 36, no. 6 (2002): 1202–11.

⁵⁴ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §21.

Whereas modern men and women tend, Pope John Paul II observes, to transfer “the methods proper to the first sphere to those of the second”⁵⁵—to regulate the properly human sphere by means of science and technology—the dominion that the human person is called to exercise over himself belongs more properly to the order of ethics, by a positive modification of one’s own actions and a corresponding growth in virtue. Such, as I have argued elsewhere, is a confusion between what classic philosophy distinguishes as the technical, or artistic virtues that govern production (*techne*), and those that govern human action (*praxis*).⁵⁶ In the case of responsible parenthood, “it is *not* merely a question of a certain ‘*technique*’”—that is, of one means of contraception rather than another (as goes the argument of many dissenters of *Humanae Vitae*)—“but of *ethics* in the strict sense of the term,” as John Paul II explains. As governing the properly human sphere, it is “the *morality of a certain behavior*”⁵⁷ that concerns us here.

This important distinction is hardly to be taken for granted, however, as is apparent in John Noonan’s presumption—in his now classic work on contraception—that “sexual continence is contraceptive in effect.”⁵⁸ In this way, the former U.S. federal judge does not simply invite couples to divert attention away from their own transgressions by highlighting those of others, like children who

⁵⁵ Pope John Paul II, General Audience of August 22, 1984, in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 630–631.

⁵⁶ See Michele M. Schumacher, “Gender Ideology and the ‘Artistic’ Fabrication of Human Sex: Nature as Norm or the Remaking of the Human?” *The Thomist* 80 (2016): 363–423, and Georges Cottier, “Quelques réflexions d’un philosophe sur les méthodes naturelles,” in *Défis éthiques* (Saint-Maurice, CH: Editions Saint-Augustin, 1996), 145–55. Given this distinction, it should not be surprising that Jean-Yves Calvez recognizes a difference in the Church’s manner of addressing economic and political systems within the context of its social teaching and its manner of addressing questions in the domain of sexual ethics. See Jean-Yves Calvez, “Morale sociale et morale sexuelle,” *Etudes* 378 (May 5, 1993): 641–50.

⁵⁷ Pope John Paul II, General Audience of August 29, 1984, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 635 (emphasis original).

⁵⁸ He reasons to this conclusion from the premise that “sexual intercourse when an ovum will not be fertilized avoids procreation as much as intercourse where a physical barrier is used to prevent the meeting of spermatozoa and ovum” (John T. Noonan Jr., *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965], 1).

would avoid punishment by pointing to the disobedience of their siblings.⁵⁹ More significantly, he blurs the moral distinction between controlling fertility by technical means and controlling passions by way of virtue, that is to say, by way of “marital chastity,”⁶⁰ or “periodic continence.”⁶¹ Advanced is, more specifically, the underlying assumption that natural law need not imply respect for the natural ends of the (presumably healthy, and therefore fertile) human body, but that these might be manipulated by the human will in view of what the French Dominican Michel Labourdette refers to as “human” ends.⁶²

Labourdette, who played an important role in drafting the so-called majority report of the papal birth control commission charged to advise Pope Paul VI, reasons that, because the vast majority of conjugal acts are infertile (he approximates 199 out of every 200), we “cannot conclude that the nature of each one is to be fertile, nor to be ordained directly [*prochainement*] to fertility”: “There is, *for nature itself*, an intermediary justifying end,”⁶³ that of conjugal unity. “The problem, then,” as Labourdette saw it, “is that of the two-hundredth coitus. Should it be left entirely to chance?”⁶⁴

By this statement, Labourdette—a moralist of the Thomist tradition—obviously does not mean to imply that couples might manipulate their bodies at will in order to avoid an “accidental” pregnancy. He clearly opposes sterilization, for example, and he furthermore joins Paul VI in recognizing that even natural family planning might be misused if it is followed for the wrong (presumably selfish) reasons.⁶⁵ It might moreover be granted to Labourdette (since he holds

⁵⁹ To be sure, the decision to avoid pregnancy can be “motivated by selfishness” even in the case of periodic continence, the Catechism teaches (CCC, §2368). But that does not render it a contraceptive act: one “which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means” (Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §14).

⁶⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, §51.

⁶¹ CCC, §2368.

⁶² Such, more specifically, is his proposition to “fully HUMANIZE [sic] fecundity, by regulating it according to ends which are no longer animal [presumably biological] but human” (Michel Labourdette, *Cours de théologie morale*, vol. 2, *Morale spéciale*, Bibliothèque de la revue thomiste [Paris: Parole et Silence, 2012], 944 [all translations from Labourdette are my own]).

⁶³ Labourdette, *Cours de théologie morale*, 2:944

⁶⁴ Labourdette, *Cours de théologie morale*, 2:943.

⁶⁵ See Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §10, and CCC, §2368.

to what the majority report wrote) that human persons are charged with “the responsibility . . . for humanizing the gifts of nature and using them to bring the life of man to greater perfection.”⁶⁶ What is questionable, however, is to cater—as did the majority of this commission, and likewise Labourdette in the passage cited above—to “a certain change in the mind of contemporary man” such that “he feels . . . more conformed to his rational nature, created by God with liberty and responsibility, when he uses his skill to intervene in the biological processes of nature [as differing from virtuous abstinence on fertile days when a pregnancy is judged imprudent] . . . than if he would abandon himself to chance.”⁶⁷

Advanced thereby is the assumption that the exercise of responsible parenthood—in this case, the lawful decision to limit one’s family size in accord with a number of prudential decisions that belong to couples themselves “in the sight of God,” as the Council put it, and to “no one else”⁶⁸—implies, contra the position that Pope Paul VI would eventually adopt,⁶⁹ a license to obstruct the natural (in this case, the biological) end of the fertility cycle or of the sexual act. Of course, it might be granted to the majority position of the papal commission (and thus to Labourdette) that, “the order of creation

⁶⁶ “The Birth Control Report, III: The Argument for Reform,” 511 (Latin in Paupert, *Contrôle des naissances et théologie*, 156–62, at 157: “debiti hominis humanizandi et ad maiorem perfectionem pro vita hominis perducendi data naturae”). Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §16.

⁶⁷ “The Birth Control Report, III: The Argument for Reform,” 512 (Paupert, *Contrôle des naissances et théologie*, 159: “quaedam mutatio apud hominem actuale, quod ipse se sentit magis conformari suae naturae rationali cum libertate et responsabilitate a Deo creatae, quando cum arte sua efficaci intervenit in processus biologicos naturae et fines institutionis matrimonialis in conditionibus actualibus vitae attingeret, quam si seipsum ad casualitatem derelinqueret”). Similarly, he feels himself free, as the papal commission’s minority summarized the argument of its opponents, to “frustrate his own biological, sexual function, even, when voluntarily aroused, because it is subject to reason for the bettering of the human condition” (“The Birth Control Report. II: The Conservative Case,” 483; “Minority Papal Commission Report,” in Callahan, *The Catholic Case*, 200; “Status quaestionis,” in Paupert, *Contrôle des naissances et théologie*, 174: “Ideo potest frustrare functionem biologica[m] sexuale[m] propriam, etiam voluntarie actuatam, quia rationi est subiecta pro melioranda condicione humana”).

⁶⁸ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, §50.

⁶⁹ “Excluded,” Pope Paul teaches, “is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means” (*Humanae Vitae*, §14).

does not require that all things be left untouchable just as they are but that they reach the ends to which they have been ordered.”⁷⁰ Hence, for example, the use of therapeutic means in view of curing bodily diseases is deemed fully licit by Paul VI, “even if a foreseeable impediment to procreation should result there from.”⁷¹ Similarly, Paul VI apparently granted to the majority of the commission that the natural “orientation [of sexual intercourse] toward fecundation must be rationally directed by man,”⁷² in accord with what he (Paul VI) recognized as their “duties toward God, themselves, their families and human society.”⁷³ However, the Pope who issued *Humanae Vitae* was not willing to infer from the naturally infertile days of a woman’s cycle that the act of willfully rendering infertile an otherwise fertile body or a fertilizing act—even in the name of responsible parenthood and/or marital unity—may be said to “correspond entirely to the divine decrees,” as the majority report put it.⁷⁴ Nor was Paul VI willing to conclude—as does Labourdette—that it is “not the materiality of the [birth control] method that is important,” but that the morality of the conjugal act is determined instead by what the latter calls the “human finality”⁷⁵: presumably the fostering of conjugal unity and responsible parenthood without necessarily respecting the procreative end of that same act.

Of course, “the Church is the first to praise and commend the application of human intelligence to an activity in which a rational creature such as man is so closely associated with his Creator,” Paul VI insists, “but she affirms that this must be done within the limits of the order of reality established by God.” Pointing more specifically

⁷⁰ “The Birth Control Report, III: The Argument for Reform,” 512 (“Documentum syntheticum de moralitate regulationis nativitatum,” in Paupert, *Contrôle des naissances et théologie*, 159 : “Ordo Creatoris non requirit ut omnia intanibilia relinquantur, sicuti sunt, sed ut attingantur fines ad quas ordinata sunt”).

⁷¹ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §15.

⁷² “The Birth Control Report, III. The Argument for Reform,” 512 (Paupert, *Contrôle des naissances et théologie*, 159: “itsa finalitas ab homine rationalitur formulari debet”). Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §16.

⁷³ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §10.

⁷⁴ “Birth Control Report, I: The Majority View,” 449 (“Majority Papal Commission Report,” 150; “Schema documenti de responsabili paternitate” in Paupert, *Contrôle des naissances et théologie*, 179: “ut tales decretis divinis omnino correspondent”).

⁷⁵ Michel Labourdette, *Cours de théologie morale*, 2:944: “Ce n’est plus la matérialité de la méthode qui importe, c’est la finalité humaine” (translation mine).

here to the responsibility of respecting a woman's natural fertility cycle, he encourages couples seeking to avoid pregnancy (in accord with the principles of responsible parenthood) to take "advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and [to] engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile" in view of fostering marital unity. "Neither the Church nor her doctrine is inconsistent," he explains here, "when she considers it lawful for married people to take advantage of the infertile period but condemns as always unlawful the use of means which directly prevent conception," even, he adds, when the decision to do so is motivated by "upright and serious" reasons:

In reality, these two cases are completely different. In the former the married couple rightly use a faculty provided them by nature. In the latter they obstruct the natural development of the generative process. It cannot be denied that in each case the married couple, for acceptable reasons, are both perfectly clear in their intention to avoid children and wish to make sure that none will result. But it is equally true that it is exclusively in the former case that husband and wife are ready to abstain from intercourse during the fertile period as often as for reasonable motives the birth of another child is not desirable. And when the infertile period recurs, they use their married intimacy to express their mutual love and safeguard their fidelity toward one another. In doing this they certainly give proof of a true and authentic love.⁷⁶

Such, in short, is the difference between "two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality": one, John Paul II explains, in which sexuality is separated "from its essential reference to the person" so as to be "'used' as an 'object,'" and another in which "sexuality is respected and promoted in its truly and fully human dimension," in "the personal unity of soul and body."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §16.

⁷⁷ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), §32. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane* (Letter to Families; 1994), §19, and CCC, §2332.

Respecting God's Creative Intentions: Harmonizing Subjective and Objective Ends

From the foregoing, we are invited to distinguish—within the context of arguing for an integral human ecology—between nature's own ends, as bespeaking the Creator's intention, and ends that are projected onto nature by the human will in view of nature's manipulation. In fact, as the arguments advanced by Labourdette and Noonan illustrate, *much* of the controversy surrounding the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* presupposes a confusion between the *objective* end of the moral act—what the Catechism designates as the “good toward which the will deliberately directs itself,”⁷⁸ in this case the inseparable goods of marital unity and procreation—and the *subjective* end or intention of that act, which “resides in the acting subject.”⁷⁹ Such is also, and perhaps still more clearly, what Robert Sokolowski presents as the distinction between an *end* and a *purpose*:

An end, a *telos*, belongs to a thing in itself [i.e., in virtue of its nature], while a purpose arises only when there are human beings [or other spiritual beings]. Purposes [such as achieving or avoiding pregnancy and fostering marital unity] are intentions, something we wish for and are deliberating about or acting to achieve. Ends [such as the conception of a child and the uniting of the couple], in contrast, are there apart from any human [as distinct from *divine*] wishes and deliberations. They are what the thing is when it has reached its best state, its perfection and completion in and for itself [and such is manifestly the perfection of our procreative powers]. Ends and purposes are both goods, but goods of different ontological orders.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ CCC, §1751.

⁷⁹ CCC, §1752. See also *ST* I-II, q. 12, a. 1, where intention is presented as willed, and I-II, q. 21, a. 1, ad 2, where the distinction is made between the last end and the proximate end.

⁸⁰ Robert Sokolowski, “What is Natural Law? Human Purposes and Natural Ends,” *The Thomist* 68 (2004): 507–29, at 508–9. Such is also the distinction that Robert Spaemann makes between the object (*objectum*) and the goal (*finis*) of an action: “The *objectum* is the content of meaning that we name when we are asked *what* we are doing. The *finis* is that to which we point when we are asked why we are doing what we do” (“Individual Actions [2000],” in *A Robert Spaemann Reader*, trans. and ed. D. C. Schindler and Jeanne Heffernan Schindler [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015], 139–53, at 148).

The so-called “human finality” to which Labourdette refers is clearly to be understood in the second (subjective) sense: the couple’s *intention* is to avoid (presumably for legitimate reasons) the procreative *end* of the conjugal act. Again, this is not to deny that the decision to avoid pregnancy is clearly one that belongs to the couple. Nonetheless, in acting upon their decision, they are called by both Vatican II and the Catechism “to conform their behavior to the objective character of morality.” In the case at hand—that of harmonizing “married love with the responsible transmission of life”—“the morality of the behavior does not depend on sincere intention and evaluation of motives alone,” the Council teaches, “but it must be determined by objective criteria, criteria drawn from the nature of the person and his acts, criteria that respect the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love.”⁸¹

Such, more specifically, are criteria based on the body–soul unity of the human person. As Robert Spaemann explains:

Men are not spirits, who move a machine from within. They are living beings, and this means that their subjectivity is not a pure transcendental freedom vis-à-vis a world of exterior facts. If such were the case, then constituting a motive for action would be all together incomprehensible. . . . In reality, we do not at all “pose” the ends, but we find them already in ourselves and in others, in the form of inclinations.⁸²

This does not mean, of course, that we are powerless over our own inclinations. “The fact that we are hungry does not constrain us to eat,” Spaemann explains.⁸³ It does mean, however, that it is not sufficient to regard our own intentions in judging the moral character of our acts, that we must also, as Elizabeth Anscombe explains, consider “whether the act itself is all right, and the former [our intentions]

⁸¹ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, §51, cited in CCC, §2368.

⁸² Robert Spaemann, “Le ‘naturel’ et le ‘non-naturel’ sont-ils des concepts pertinents pour le droit et la morale,” in *Chasser le Naturel ?* trans. Stéphane Robilliard (Paris: Les Presses universitaires de l’IPC, 2015), 101–27, at 116 (English translation mine). The citation does not occur in the original German: “Sind ‘natürlich’ und ‘unnatürlich’ moralisch revelante Begriffe?” in *Was lehrt uns die Natur? Die Natur in den Künsten und Wissenschaften*, ed. Venanz Schubert (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1989), 253–80.

⁸³ Spaemann, “Sind ‘natürlich’ und ‘unnatürlich’ moralisch revelante Begriffe?” 266 (translation mine).

might be all right while the latter [the act itself] was not.”⁸⁴ In other words—and Labourdette would certainly agree—objective moral criteria are founded in objective anthropological norms that are to be discovered in our own God-given nature, which in turn conditions our actions.

In fact, in using the term “significance” to describe the procreative and unitive aspects of the conjugal act (*Humanae Vitae* § 12), rather than “ends,” Paul VI wished to express, Cardinal Carlo Caffara argues, “a correlation between the conjugal act *which signifies* and a subject to which *the significance*, the ‘significant message,’ is made.”⁸⁵ In other words, “the order of nature”—the order implied, in the case at hand, when “using the sexual urge in accord with its nature and purpose”—has, as John Paul II put it in one of his pre-papal works, “been turned over to human beings for conscious realization,” whence his insistence—long before he ever assumed St. Peter’s Chair—on the unity of natural law and “the personalistic norm.”⁸⁶ This correlation between the subject and the objective significance of his or her act points in turn to a classic understanding of truth as the conformity of human knowledge (and thus also human willing) to reality, to the world that God has made.⁸⁷

Similarly—to return to Kerr’s comment regarding the “unintelligibility” of the connection between the unitive and procreative significations of the conjugal act—we might ask whether it does not betray a confusion between what Caffara also refers to as “the *manifesting* function (of the truth), which belongs to the conscience” and “the *constitutive* function of the truth, which . . . cannot *in any way* be attributed to man’s moral conscience.”⁸⁸ In other words, the

⁸⁴ G. E. M. Anscombe, “On *Humanae Vitae*,” in *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics* by G. E. M. Anscombe, ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2008), 192–98, at 194.

⁸⁵ Carlo Caffara, “Conscience, Truth, and Magisterium in Conjugal Morality,” in Pontifical Council for the Family, *Marriage and Family: Experiencing the Church’s Teaching in Married Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 21–36, at 33–34. Cf. Pope John Paul II, General Audience of July 18, 1984, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 620.

⁸⁶ Karol Wojtyła, “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics: Reflections and Postulates,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 279–99, at 293. The original Polish version was published in 1965.

⁸⁷ See, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 1.

⁸⁸ Caffara, “Conscience, Truth, and Magisterium in Conjugal Morality,” 22.

epistemological error of attributing to the human intellect the possibility of establishing—rather than that of discovering—what Caffara calls “ontological truth”⁸⁹ might be perceived as a slippery slope for according to the human conscience the possibility of determining (rather than accepting or refusing) moral truth. Such is the origin of the confusion between, on the one hand, anthropological norms and normative practice⁹⁰ and, on the other hand, “the supernatural sense of the faithful” specified by Vatican II⁹¹ and the “consensus of the faithful.”⁹²

In short, what is in question in much of the debate surrounding the doctrine of *Humanae Vitae* is the relation between, on the one hand, our spiritual acts of knowledge and volition and, on the other hand, a created world order of which we are a part—an order that is not of our making. Hence, for example, we might ask ourselves whether our marital relations entail, as I put it in another context, “a manipulation of reality,” a sort of “bending” of the real—in this case, the

⁸⁹ Caffara, “Conscience, Truth, and Magisterium in Conjugal Morality,” 34.

⁹⁰ Such is what Georges Cottier signals as the confusion between the “normal” and the “normative” (see Georges Cottier, *Défis éthiques* [Saint-Maurice, CH: Editions Saint-Augustin, 1996], 90ff). Spaemann points out: “Normality is not a statistical concept. If 90% of all men have a migraine, they should not be considered the healthy ones to whom the remaining 10% should adapt” (“Sind ‘natürlich’ und ‘unnatürlich’ moralisch revelante Begriffe?” 260; translation mine). As a case in point, Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler maintain that: “[For] people with a permanent homosexual orientation who do not choose that orientation . . . a homosexual orientation *is* normative. . . . *Homosexual* and *heterosexual* are further specifications of *sexual* orientation, and this further specification constitutes what is normative for homosexual or heterosexual persons” (*The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008], 108–9).

⁹¹ See Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, §25.

⁹² Hence, for example, we read the following in a September 25, 2015, letter to the editor by Patricia Southward in *The New York Times*: “A mechanism already exists for the church to change its prohibition on artificial birth control in a theologically sound, well-established and face-saving way. It is called ‘sensus fidelium,’ or the ‘sense of the faithful.’ It holds that a widespread (approaching universal) agreement among the clergy and the faithful on an issue indicates truth. Your editorial cites statistics that suggest that this has already been achieved regarding birth control, and, further, that Pope Paul VI acted in opposition to the *sensus fidelium*” (nytimes.com/2015/09/25/opinion/artificial-birth-control-and-the-catholic-faithful.html). On the distinction between majority opinion and the sense of the faithful, see Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, §5.

objective meaning of the human body, with its fertility—"according to my field of interest," my own subjective meaning of love, or even my "best" intentions, or whether instead those marital relations entail "a conformity of my knowing [and consequently of my volitional] powers to an objective reality" that is given, both as a fact (*datum*) and as a gift (*donum*).⁹³ In other words, this teaching challenges the presumption that the human person is free to impose a meaning upon his or her own (corporal-spiritual) nature in a manner that is arguably at odds with the intrinsic (creational, or God-given) meaning of this same nature.⁹⁴ As Anscombe puts it, rather matter-of-factly: "To take steps to render the act infertile in case it is fertile is to denature your intension."⁹⁵

"What is at stake" in *Humanae Vitae* is thus, as Pope John Paul II puts it, "the truth, first in the ontological dimension ('innermost structure') and then—as a consequence—in the subjective and psychological dimension ('meaning')."⁹⁶ Two planes—nature and person—are thus organically joined in this doctrine, because the person is presented as "a subject who is conscious of the order of nature [including his or her own nature as a physical-psychological-spiritual whole], and responsible for preserving it."⁹⁷ Not surprisingly, the challenge launched by John Paul II's theology of the body thus consists, in his

⁹³ Michele M. Schumacher, "A Woman in Stone or in the Heart of Man? Navigating between Naturalism and Idealism in the Spirit of *Veritatis Splendor*," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 11, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 1249–86, at 1270.

⁹⁴ Such is also what Pope Benedict recognizes as a confusion of ends and means, and likewise as a failure to recognize freedom as "profoundly shaped by our being, and by its limits": "No one shapes his own conscience arbitrarily, but we all build our own 'I' on the basis of a 'self' which is given to us" (Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritatis in Veritate* [2009], §68 ; on the confusion of ends and means, see §71).

⁹⁵ Anscombe, "On *Humanae Vitae*," 196.

⁹⁶ Pope John Paul II, General Audience of July 11, 1984, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 620: "'Meaning' is born in consciousness with the rereading of the (ontological) truth of the object. Through this rereading, the (ontological) truth enters, so to speak, into the cognitive, that is, subjective and psychological dimension." We are not far from the insight of Caffara, cited above, regarding the "correlation between the conjugal act which signifies and a subject to which the significance, the 'significant message,' is made" (Caffara, "Conscience, Truth, and Magisterium in Conjugal Morality," 33).

⁹⁷ Wojtyła, "The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics," 293. See also *Veritatis Splendor*, §48, where Pope John Paul II expresses concern that the human body not be reduced to "a raw datum, devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design."

own words, of analyzing “the *personalistic aspects* contained in this document [*Humanae Vitae*]” in an effort to determine “what *true progress* consists in, that is, the development of *the human person*,”⁹⁸ by the practice of virtue at the heart of an integral human ecology.

Integral Human Fulfilment: The Unity of Naturalism and Personalism

In this way, the doctrine of *Humanae Vitae* is, John Paul II suggests, inscribed within the goal, proper to Vatican II, of “recapturing the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values” in view of renewing Western civilization. “Only an awareness of the primacy of these [ethical] values”—which John Paul II identifies as “the values of the human person as such”—“enables man to use the immense possibilities given him by science in such a way as to bring about the true advancement of the human person in his or her whole truth, in his or her freedom and dignity. Science is called to ally itself with wisdom.”⁹⁹ Such an alliance is, he also suggests, the means whereby the self-sufficiency of modern man, who ironically submits himself to “*the demi-god* of modern technology,”¹⁰⁰ might be overcome. Meanwhile, the editor of the Latin-French edition of the papal birth control commission documents argues in the opposite direction that “one cannot legitimately take from spouses the disposition of their own bodies, and submit them instead to some unknown and unpredictable Nature goddess.”¹⁰¹ Such, as we have seen, is also the proposition of Labourdette, who considers it morally justifiable “to intervene [by artificial means] so that the fecundity of the [procreative] act does not depend upon chance (*hasard*), nor simply upon biological rhythm, but that it be willed in a *responsible manner*, which takes into consideration the whole of human finality.”¹⁰²

To be sure, the human being is “not a collection or juxtaposition of diverse and autonomous natural inclinations, but a substantial and personal whole,” as the International Theological Commission points out. For this very reason, however, there can be no contradiction or opposition between nature and freedom, nor between the natural and

⁹⁸ Pope John Paul II, General Audience of November 28, 1984, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 662 (emphasis original).

⁹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, §8; cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, §15.

¹⁰⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, trans. Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 55.

¹⁰¹ Jean-Marie Paupert, “Introduction,” in *Contrôle des naissances et théologie*, 10–48, at 40 (all translations from Paupert’s introduction are my own).

¹⁰² Labourdette, *Cours de théologie morale*, 2:944 (emphasis original).

moral structure of the human being. Rather, “in this organic whole, each part preserves a proper and irreducible meaning, which must be taken into account by reason in the elaboration of the overall mission of the human person.”¹⁰³ As differing from irrational creatures, who are subject to divine law uniquely by their natural inclinations, human beings are thus subject to the Creator’s governance both by way of their natural inclinations *and* by way of their knowledge, as St. Thomas teaches.¹⁰⁴ Or as Labourdette himself correctly reasons: because the human person is “ONE,” that which is “*most human* in him [or her] *assumes and integrates . . . the requirements of vegetative and animal life: not precisely as vegetative and animal, but as having to be [devant être] HUMANLY experienced.*”¹⁰⁵ Hence, the natural inclination to reproduce, in the case at hand, must be experienced in a “concretely human” manner, in a “manner worthy of man,” within, Labourdette specifies, the specific context of marriage and in accord with the principles of “responsible parenthood.”¹⁰⁶

In this way, the French Dominican apparently agrees with Pope John Paul II when the latter explains that it is to “*the person himself in the unity of soul and body*, in the unity of his spiritual and biological inclinations and of all the other specific characteristics necessary for the pursuit of his end,” that natural law refers. Hence, John Paul II continues, “natural inclinations take on moral relevance only insofar as they refer to the human person and his authentic fulfilment.”¹⁰⁷ Labourdette’s proposition, however, challenges the notion that natural (including biological) inclinations are, as the International Theological Commission suggests, formulated by spiritual creatures “*as fundamental norms of their moral action,*”¹⁰⁸ and even as manifestations

¹⁰³ International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law” (2009), §79.

¹⁰⁴ See *ST* I-II, q. 93, a. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Michel Labourdette, *Cours de théologie morale*, vol. 1, *Morale fondamentale*, Bibliothèque de la revue thomiste (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2010), 676: “Cela même qui est en lui le *plus humain* assume et *s’intègre*, comme étant en un sens antérieures, des exigences qui concernent la vie végétative et animale : non précisément en tant que végétative et animale, mais comme *devant être HUMAINEMENT* [sic] vécue au plan même de la vie végétative et animale” (all translations of Labourdette from this work are my own).

¹⁰⁶ Labourdette, *Cours de théologie morale*, 1:677.

¹⁰⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, §50.

¹⁰⁸ The International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” §63 (emphasis mine).

of “the divine intentions,”¹⁰⁹ for the good or perfection of human nature, and thus also of the human person.

Because, moreover, the precepts of natural law are “according to the order of natural inclinations,” as St. Thomas maintains—and Labourdette apparently agrees—“all those things to which man has a natural inclination” (including the inclination to reproduce and to educate offspring) are “naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance.”¹¹⁰ Similarly, the appetitive powers are naturally drawn—by way of pleasure—to those activities that are, St. Thomas continues, “necessary for man’s well-being, as regards the preservation either of the individual or of the species.” To willingly “reject pleasure to the extent of omitting things that are necessary for nature’s preservation” is therefore considered sinful by Labourdette’s own (Thomistic) tradition.¹¹¹

Of course, this is not to deny that it might be “praiseworthy” or “even necessary” to abstain from these pleasurable acts, Aquinas explains, as when one refrains from sexual intercourse for reasons of health.¹¹² There is no question, however, that a man might seek, in good conscience, to retain the pleasure of a life-giving act while simultaneously renouncing the very good that nature has thereby prescribed for its own preservation. In the words of St. Thomas, “chastity takes its name from the fact that reason *chastises* concupiscence, which, like a child needs curbing,”¹¹³ *not* because “the free act of reason . . . is incompatible with the aforesaid pleasure [of the conjugal act],”¹¹⁴ but because the ordering principles of responsible parenting and justice toward one’s spouse and even toward the human species or human society might be diverted by self-indulging lust. That is why the Catechism teaches that “sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.”¹¹⁵ To isolate sexual activity from its proper meaning is not simply to oppose biological ends, therefore, “but also to contradict,” as the International Theological Commission recog-

¹⁰⁹ The International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” §70.

¹¹⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2; cf. Labourdette, *Cours de théologie morale*, 1:676–77.

¹¹¹ *ST* II-II, q. 142, a. 1.

¹¹² *ST* II-II, q. 142, a. 1.

¹¹³ *ST* II-II, q. 151, a. 1.

¹¹⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 153, a. 2, ad 2.

¹¹⁵ CCC, §2351.

nizes, “the interpersonal values that a responsible and fully human sexual life must promote.”¹¹⁶ Of course, as C. S. Lewis reasons in his ever-witty manner: “The Christian attitude does not mean that there is anything wrong about sexual pleasure, any more than about the pleasure of eating. It means that you must not isolate that pleasure and try to get it by itself, any more than you ought to try to get the pleasures of taste without swallowing and digesting, by chewing things and spitting them out again.”¹¹⁷ To be more specific, natural inclinations are humanized when they are consciously and willfully appropriated or even refused for good and noble reasons, *not* when they are altered with respect to their ends. When the ancient Romans vomited their meals in a *vomitorium* in order to eat still more, far from elevating the natural act, they actually denigrated it.¹¹⁸

The Intrinsic Evil of Contraception and the Threat to Human Life

As these examples serve to illustrate, human freedom is responsibly exercised when one acts from what St. Thomas designates “a habit that is suitable to his [man’s] nature.”¹¹⁹ Such is the virtue of chastity, which the *Catechism* presents as “the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being.”¹²⁰ “The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in him,” an integrity that “ensures the unity of the person.”¹²¹ When, on the other hand, one acts from a habit opposed to his corporal-spiritual nature (that of contracepting, in the case at hand), he or she acts according to what St. Thomas designates as “some corruption affecting that nature.”¹²² And let us not fool ourselves: contraception does indeed corrupt our sexual powers and acts by willingly rendering them infertile.

By reason of such a corruption, contraception may be considered an evil¹²³ in the most basic sense of the term: it represents the

¹¹⁶ International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” §80.

¹¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Collins, 1952), 93.

¹¹⁸ The example is provided by Spaemann, “Sind ‘natürlich’ und ‘unnatürlich’ moralisch revelante Begriffe?” 268–69.

¹¹⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 108, a. 1, ad 2.

¹²⁰ *CCC*, §2337.

¹²¹ *CCC*, §2338.

¹²² *ST* I-II, q. 108, a. 1, ad 2.

¹²³ Indeed, the Church considers it an “intrinsic evil.” See: *CCC*, §2370; Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §14; and Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, §80. This

absence—indeed the willing removal—of a good that belongs to human nature and to the conjugal act in virtue of creation;¹²⁴ whence the irony of the popular reference to contraception as a form of reproductive “health.” As every infertile couple desirous of children knows only too well, healthy reproductive systems are fertile—whence the scandal of doctors prescribing contraceptive “medicine for women in good health,” as French sexologist Thérèse Hargot remarks.¹²⁵ Thanks to hormonal contraception, it is possible, Hargot observes, to be “sick without an illness,” and medicine is put at the service of our desires: “[desires] of not becoming pregnant, of interrupting a pregnancy, then of provoking it or of engendering some years later.”¹²⁶ The logic of contraception is thus based on the assumption, as Archbishop Charles Chaput recognizes, “that fertility is an infection which must be attacked and controlled, exactly as antibiotics attack bacteria.”¹²⁷ Indeed, scientists are currently developing contraceptive “vaccines” that work by “stimulating the immune system to shut down some body functions necessary for pregnancy, analogous to the way vaccines given to infants cause the body to fight childhood diseases such as smallpox, mumps, and measles.”¹²⁸

To contracept, in sum, is to deprive the human reproductive system of its inherent power: not just any power, moreover, but the natural and nonetheless “quasi-sacred”¹²⁹ power of procreation. This is arguably among the most distinguished of all human powers, because, as the Vatican II teaches, “human life and the duty of transmitting it are not limited by the horizons of this life only: their true

was also the conclusion of the minority papal commission report (see “The Birth Control Report, II: The Conservative Case”).

¹²⁴ See CCC, §2366, and ST I-II, q. 21, a. 1.

¹²⁵ Thérèse Hargot, *Une jeunesse sexuellement libérée (ou presque)* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 2016), 123. All translations from Hargot will be by own.

¹²⁶ Hargot, *Une jeunesse sexuellement libérée*, 132.

¹²⁷ Archbishop Charles Chaput, “Humanae Vitae: A Misunderstood Papal Intervention,” *Origins* 28, no. 14 (September 17, 1998): 248–51, at 248. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, §23.

¹²⁸ Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 146. See also Rajesh K. Naz, Satish K. Gupta, Jagdish C. Gupta, Hemant K. Vyas, and G. P. Talwar, “Recent Advances in Contraceptive Vaccine Development: A Mini-Review,” *Human Reproduction* 20, no. 12 (December 1, 2005): 3271–83 (academic.oup.com/humrep/article/20/12/3271/2913771/Recent-advances-in-contraceptive-vaccine).

¹²⁹ “The Birth Control Report, II: The Conservative Case,” 480 (“The Minority Papal Commission Report,” 185; “Status quaestionis,” 168).

evaluation and full significance can be understood only in reference to *man's eternal destiny*.”¹³⁰ Hence the important warning of Paul VI: “Unless” we are willing to leave “the responsibility of procreating life . . . to the arbitrary decision of men,” it is necessary to admit “certain limits, beyond which it is wrong to go.”¹³¹

As a case in point, one might consider the irony of the position advanced by the Jean-Marie Paupert. It is “proper to man,” he explains in his summary of the majority position in 1967, “to transform nature, including his own [nature], to struggle against ‘natural’ processes when they go against humanization, against the fullness of life, against the good of the individual and of the species.”¹³² This presumably worthy goal—which conjures up the images of persons fighting disease, storms, landslides, and tornados—takes on a whole new twist, however, when the so-called enemy is presented as the “threat” of an unwanted, or even an “unworthy,” child. Paupert points, more specifically, to the so-called “grave biological danger” of the “various trisomies of chromosomes,” which he links to the age of the ovule and sperm, and thus also – or such is his claim – to the practice of natural family planning. Addressing more specifically the “problem of eugenics,” the French theologian asks: Whereas “the selection of the race” was once effected “by the ‘natural’ means of the death of the weakest, is it not now fitting to supplant” natural selection “by a possibility of restraining the right [*sic!*] to procreation [i.e., by more or less compulsory contraception] in function of the good of the species?” He claims that “the theologians of the majority [position] and likewise the specialists [presumably in science] do not hesitate to respond affirmatively to this question.”¹³³

One can hardly help but recognize, with astonishment, the accuracy of Lewis’s warning, already in 1947, “as regards contraceptives”:

There is a paradoxical, negative sense, in which all possible future generations are the patients or subjects of a power wielded by those already alive. By contraception simply, they

¹³⁰ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, §51, also cited in CCC, §2371. In fact, the “union of man and woman in marriage” was called to be “a way of imitating in the flesh,” as the *Catechism* puts it, “the Creator’s generosity and fecundity” (CCC, §2335).

¹³¹ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §17.

¹³² Paupert, “Introduction,” 38–39.

¹³³ Paupert, “Introduction,” 28.

are denied existence; by contraception used as a means of selective breeding, they are, without their concurring voice, made to be what one generation, for its own reasons, may choose to prefer. From this point of view, what we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument.¹³⁴

Moreover, beyond "exercises of power . . . in breeding," Lewis recognized that "the thing called 'Man's power over Nature' must always and essentially be . . . the power of one nation over others" or "the power of majorities over minorities," or again "of a government over the people."¹³⁵ We could hardly be closer to Pope Paul VI's prophecy of the slippery slope between the so-called *right* to contracept and the *obligation* to do so. "It could well happen," he argued in 1968—and it subsequently *has* happened, not only in China, as is well known, *but* also in Peru, India, Indonesia, South Africa, Puerto Rico, and other parts of the so-called third world, notably under pressure from "first" world nations¹³⁶—that people may "give into the hands of public authorities the power to intervene [by way of mandatory contraception, sterilization and/or abortion] in the most personal and

¹³⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 68–69. As a case in point, It should thus not be surprising that the chair of Stanford Center for Biomedical Ethics and director of Stanford's Center for Law and the Biosciences predicted in 2012 that, within fifty years, "most children [in the Western world] will be conceived in IVF clinics"—as selecting your kids for health traits gets not only cheap and easy but outright encouraged by insurance companies and governments trying to rein in health-care expenses" (Bruce Goldman, "The End of Sex," *Stanford Medicine*, January 19, 2012, scopeblog.stanford.edu/2012/01/19/the-end-of-sex/).

¹³⁵ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 69.

¹³⁶ See: Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 142, 145; Marielle Sala, "Forced Sterilization and Impunity in Peru," *50.50*, February 10, 2014, opendemocracy.net/5050/mariella-sala/forced-sterilization-and-impunity-in-peru; Michael Cook, "Remembering the Dark Story of Peru's Population Control Campaign," *Mercatornet*, December 17, 2014, mercatornet.com/demography/view/remembering_the_dark_story_of_perus_population_control_campaign/15347; Liz Ford, "Peru's Forcibly Sterilised Women Find Their Voice," *The Guardian*, January 4, 2016, theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jan/04/peru-forced-sterilisation-quipu-project-alberto-fujimori; Soutik Biswas, "India's Dark History of Sterilization," *BBC News*, November 14, 2014, bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-30040790; Kathleen A. Tobin, "International Birth Control Politics: The Evolution of a Catholic Contraceptive Debate in Latin America," *Journal for the Studies of Religions and Ideologies* 1, no. 2 (2002): 66–80.

intimate responsibility of husband and wife.”¹³⁷ Similarly, Pope John Paul II warned in 1995 that, unless we are willing to put ourselves “at the mercy of the unrestrained will of individuals or the oppressive totalitarianism of public authority,” we must acknowledge our “inherent condition” as “creature[s]” to whom “being and life” have been entrusted “as a gift and a duty.”¹³⁸

Conclusion: Human Ecology and Conjugal Chastity

Of course, the challenge of caring for our bodies and of developing habits suitable to our nature confronts us once again with the question of norms in the traditional sense of the term: as rooted within nature, *qua* created. “For the fact that a creature subsists according to a certain standard and certain limits indicates that it comes from some source,” St. Thomas reasons.¹³⁹ From this perspective, Josef Pieper has good reason to believe that the condemnation of birth control by the Catholic Church has its origin “not in a ‘conception of nature that is confined to biology’”—as is often maintained, as we have seen—“but in nothing other than a profoundly responsible earnestness, which attempts to do justice to man’s status as creature.”¹⁴⁰ When, however, the notion of creation is lost, not only is “the acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift”¹⁴¹ compromised, but so too is the notion of “a moral law written into human nature itself,” as Pope Francis acknowledges.¹⁴² Hence, for example, members of the pontifical birth control commission are reported by Paupert as reasoning in much the same way: whereas moral norms were once considered from the perspective of natural teleology, “today, now that we know nature better, we are obliged to ask if the *intentio naturae* still has a value.”¹⁴³

¹³⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §17.

¹³⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, §96.

¹³⁹ *ST* I, q. 93, a. 6.

¹⁴⁰ Josef Pieper, “Creatureliness and Human Nature: Reflections on the Philosophical Method of Jean-Paul Sartre,” in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 173–84, at 181.

¹⁴¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, §155.

¹⁴² Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, September 25, 2015, w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html.

¹⁴³ Paupert, “Introduction,” 30. Hence, the natural rhythms of the human body have no significance in discerning God’s will for our lives. Instead, Paupert proposes, God’s will should be discerned uniquely by way of revelation and

Spaemann, on the other hand, argues that the normative value of nature is necessarily taken for granted by most men and women today. Indeed, we would never act at all if we had to justify every premise of our actions. “So long as the natural [realm] served this [normative] function, the fact of not wanting to have a child or not wanting to have others required justification.”¹⁴⁴ The “invisible” character of oral contraceptives has, however, as I have argued, reversed this logic. Indeed, it is ironically the natural fact of pregnancy that is now presented as the “exception” that requires explanation. To decide for the life of a child at the beginning of the twenty-first century is simply taken as synonymous with having “planned” his or her conception.¹⁴⁵ No place is left to ambivalence in this contraceptive age, at least not as far as human life itself is concerned. When a doctor poses the question of whether or not a pregnancy is desired, it falls almost entirely upon the woman to decide the value that she will accord to the so-called “mass of cells” within her uterus. “At that instant,” Hargot observes, “she becomes god: her desire alone can let live,” or let die.¹⁴⁶

Readily available contraception thus “considerably increases the weight of [parental] responsibilities” at the very moment in history in which “individualism and the ‘passion of self’ have,” as Elisabeth Badinter recognizes, “never been so powerful.”¹⁴⁷ Given the serious

grace.

¹⁴⁴ Robert Spaemann, “*Vivere viventibus est esse: Procréation, naissance, mort*,” in *Chasser le naturel ?* 129–61, at 133. This is an unedited conference paper delivered by Professor Spaemann in Louvain in March of 2002.

¹⁴⁵ Indeed, as Pope John Paul II diagnosed the situation already in 1995, when the unitive and the procreative meanings inherent to the conjugal act are artificially separated, “its fruitfulness is subjected to the caprice of the couple.”: “Procreation then becomes the ‘enemy’ to be avoided in sexual activity: if it is welcomed, this is only because it expresses a desire, or indeed the intention, to have a child ‘at all costs,’ and not because it signifies the complete acceptance of the other and therefore an openness to the richness of life which the child represents” (*Evangelium Vitae*, §23).

¹⁴⁶ Hargot, *Une jeunesse sexuellement libérée*, 145. “Because ‘to desire’ signifies ‘to plan,’” within the context of our present Western culture, “no place is left to ambiguity,” Hargot observes (144).

¹⁴⁷ Elisabeth Badinter, *The Conflict: How Modern Motherhood Undermines the Status of Women*, trans. Adriana Hunter (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2011), 15. See also Michele M. Schumacher, “Women’s Self-Interest or Sacrificial Motherhood: Personal Desires, Natural Inclinations and the Meaning of Love,” *The Thomist* 77, no. 1 (2013): 71–101.

responsibilities that motherhood entails moreover, the influential French feminist urges young women to make rational, level-headed decisions for or against parenthood by “calculat[ing] clearly the pleasures and hardships, the benefits and sacrifices,” on the one hand, and one’s personal “capacity for altruism,” on the other. In this way, she suggests, reason should exercise the upper hand: not against concupiscent, but against an ever-present “halo of illusions.”¹⁴⁸ Badinter thus recommends that “responsible” parenthood be determined according to the empiricist paradigm, which, as Pope Francis explains, “exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object.”¹⁴⁹ We could hardly be further from Spaemann’s earthbound remark: “To engender a child is not an activity issuing from an instrumental rationality.”¹⁵⁰

As if to mock three generations of pill users who seem to have forgotten the “inseparable connection” between the unitive and the procreative meanings of the sexual act, the ninety-some-year-old philosopher reminds us of a fact that was still obvious to members of his own generation: far from requiring “a superior lucidity of attention,” as is required in a work of production or fabrication, the act of procreation entails the very *surrender* of rationality. “Don’t go believing that I thought of you [my son] when I was with your mother,” Spaemann writes in words borrowed from Gottfried Benn. “Her eyes became so beautiful while we made love.” At the moment of conception, Spaemann explains, “individualizing consciousness is relinquished within the non-individualized [dare we call it *natural*?] current of life.”¹⁵¹

With these words, the German philosopher does not mean to challenge the Church’s teaching on responsible parenthood. Nor,

¹⁴⁸ Badinter, *The Conflict*, 13–14.

¹⁴⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, §106.

¹⁵⁰ Spaemann, “*Vivere viventibus est esse*,” 131. Nor, for that matter, can love itself be calculated. “No lover in the world ever sought the embraces of the woman he loved as the result of a calculation, however unconscious, that they would be more pleasurable than those of any other woman,” C. S. Lewis points out (*The Four Loves* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960], 94).

¹⁵¹ Spaemann, “*Vivere viventibus est esse*,” 131. The same passage from Gottfried Benn is cited by Spaemann in “Sind ‘natürlich’ und ‘unnatürlich’ moralisch revelante Begriffe?” 217: “Bildet euch doch nicht ein dass ich an euch gedacht habe, als ich mit eurer Mutter gin. Ihre Augen wurden mimmer so schön bei der Liebe.”

however, would he suggest that we simply abandon ourselves to hedonism, a presumed “value” in Badinter’s own “rational” calculation for or against motherhood. He does, however, think it necessary to remind us of the *natural* character of both the sexual act and its fruit. As Lewis remarks, the “preservation of society, and of the species itself, are ends that do not hang on the precarious thread of Reason.” Rather, “they are given by Instinct.”¹⁵²

Lewis’s point, of course, is to unveil the truth of our sexual desires as ordered to ends in virtue of nature itself, a truth that has been obscured by the scientific manipulation of nature by contraception. At the same time, however, and in virtue of the same logic, he argues for the need of governing principles, or natural moral norms—based on the corporal-spiritual unity of the human being, and thus also on the unity of the sensitive and the rational appetites—to order these impulses or desires in accord with the overall purpose and meaning of human life inscribed within our nature as created. “The old [sexual] taboos,” which likewise acted as ethical-cultural norms, “served some real purpose in helping to preserve the species,” he observes, “but contraceptives have modified this and we can now abandon many of the taboos.” “For of course,” Lewis adds in his ever-provocative manner, “sexual desire, being instinctive, is to be gratified whenever it does not conflict with the preservation of the species.”¹⁵³

In their insistence that procreation is a natural process, both Lewis and Spaemann suggest that it is also governed by a divinely ordained moral norm: the “inseparable connection” between the unitive and the procreative meanings of the conjugal act, as specified by *Humanae Vitae*. The underlying moral challenge is that of aligning our minds, bodies, and wills with the creative and redemptive intentions of God so as to make of that which is “most impersonal, namely sexual relations . . . the highest expression of personal love.”¹⁵⁴ This requires, of course, that we acknowledge the goodness of the created order, but also that we recognize our own weaknesses, including our tendency to worship and serve “the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25); whence the recent plea of Pope Francis: “Let us not fall into the sin of trying to replace the Creator. We are creatures, and not

¹⁵² Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 44–45.

¹⁵³ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 45.

¹⁵⁴ Robert Spaemann, “The Paradoxes of Love,” *Love and the Dignity of Human Life: On Nature and Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 2012), 1–25, at 22. This is a collection of lectures given in English.

omnipotent. Creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place accepting it and respecting it *as it was created*.”¹⁵⁵ For, “not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given,” Francis reasons in words borrowed from Pope John Paul II, “but, man too is God’s gift to man . . . [and] must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed.”¹⁵⁶ N-V

¹⁵⁵ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), §56 (emphasis mine).

¹⁵⁶ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centissimus Annus*, §38, cited by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, §115.